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Abstract

Educational counseling applied to adults as a distinct group is becoming increasingly mcre important because education is fast becoming a way of life in our society. People are mcre and mcre desiring tc further their educaticn; cut of their motives for education ccmes the emotional significance. There is an interesting relationship between personality problems and educational problems. The learning styles of individuals seems to be seriously affected by their personality. Types of educational counseling prcblems include: (1) the timid learner, (2) the fickle learner, and (3) the sporadic learner. Each of these types do not kncw how to learn and thus eventually fail at their educational task. The most common educational counseling problems encountered with adults are: (1) lack cf self confidence in one's ability to learn, (2) unrealistic expectations of progress, (3) conflicting values and attitudes, (4) theoretical or irrelevant learning tasks, (5) seeking help tcc late or in the wrcng places, and (6) lack of efficient reading and study habits. Persistence in pursuing educational goals can, however, by itself and with counseling, help adults to reach their ultimate goal. (KJ)

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Educational Counseling for Adults

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Defining the area of educational counseling

Educational counseling can be defined very simply as counseling for overcoming educational handicaps. The word counseling refers to a process of communicating deeper concerns to another for assistance in resolving conflicts or gaining more objective views of the nature of problems. The phrase educational handicaps refers to training or skill deficiencies of an academic sort which make further learning in a particular area either unnecessarily difficult, unlikely, or even impossible.

The difference between educational counseling and other types is primarily a matter of orientation. Before anything can be a counseling matter, it must usually pose some difficulty or a threat to the person or some aspect of his effective pursuit of self-fulfillment. In educational counseling, the central focus is on learning difficulties centered around formal educational processes. This sort of counseling may differ from psychotherapy primarily because of the depth and nature of the problems dealt with. The counseling processes identified with psychotherapy are generally of such a basic nature that they effect a great portion of the total life functioning of the individual. Increasingly in today's society, there are numerous situations in which, in a broader sense, one's life functioning can be seriously impaired because of academic or scholastic difficulties. Therefore one must be prepared to find that a number of educational counseling cases may greatly resemble psychotherapy because of the central nature of education in self-realization in today's society.

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Educational counseling applied to adults as a distinct group is becoming increasingly more important because education is fast becoming a way of life in our society. Learning has taken on new dimensions because of the very nature of contemporary society. Education can no longer limit to a set period of childhood development. Our society has changed and will continue to change to such an extent and with such speed that in the course of the normal vocational life, any given individual can expect to need to be reeducated or trained several times before retirement. Education is a life need today and it continues to be the most effective way to develop human potentiality.

Educational opportunities have been immensely expanded to meet the educational demands of a changing society. In the past, educational opportunities at higher levels especially were much more limited. Because of the limited incomes of many families, higher education was simply beyond the means of most people. The nature of work required in the past was such that very little leisure time was available for those who might in some way be able to finance further education. Released time to attend class on company sponsored educational programs were unknown a few dozen years ago. The agrarian character of American society in past years tended to spread people out geographically so that educational opportunities were also limited because of the problems of transportation. No doubt educational opportunities were simply unknown in many instances. There is some evidence that the lower standard of living of many people effected their dietary habits and contributed to the higher incidence of disease, the lowering of vitality, and played an important role in retarding physical development in early periods of growth which are known to effect learning ability in later life. Even individuals who might be able to overcome financial limitations lacked the necessary educational background to make taking up education in later periods of life practical for a large percentage of the population.

It must be noted that because of lack of travel and communication there was less demand for higher education by the masses in times past. Today ideas of a good life are widely publicized and known and it is easier to change occupations or improve working conditions. The result has been higher pay and better work conditions. These higher paying jobs have usually been clearly associated to educational levels. The great advances in mass communication made information regarding life and its possibilities available to more people and it stimulated many more to prepare for more self-fulfilling, satisfying, better paying jobs. In the face of rapid social change, many people developed personal reasons for wishing to further their education. They wish to know how to get along with people better, how to make a positive contribution to solving social problems, how to enrich their leisure time, how to develop their human potentialities, and especially women, have a growing need to learn how to live in a freer society. People naturally enjoy the learning process; this natural tendency is fostered by the elementary and secondary school when the educational process is successful. Because of advances in educational methods and techniques more children receive better education, and the general level of aspiration of the populus is raised. Most people entering adult education programs have a fairly specific goal in mind. It may be phrased in somewhat general terms for some persons, for example, learning to accept social responsibilities; it may be very specific for others, for example, to prepare for a particular job. Often adults enter education to satisfy psychological needs because they feel intellectually lonely, and seek the stimulating companionship of fellow learners. There are undoubtedly a large number of adults who enter education simply because they are curious and enjoy the challenge which study offers. Out of the motives for education comes its emotional significance.

Types of Educational Counseling Problems

As was indicated earlier, there is an interesting relationship between personality problems and educational problems. The learning styles of individuals seems to be seriously effected by their personality.

One type can be called the timid learner. It is typified by Mrs. A who became widowed at 45 and found it necessary to make a new life in order to support and raise her four children. Some 15 years earlier she had graduated from college. Like many women, she had always considered her education as a sort of insurance policy so it was natural for her to fall back on it at this time. She returned to college to get a teaching certificate, using part of her insurance money and savings to pay for these expenses and maintain her family until she completed her program. Her enthusiasm and determination to overcome difficulties provided motivation for her in the beginning and things looked good, however, before the second semester was completed, she became increasingly concerned about her ability to learn; she began finding it increasingly difficult to concentrate on her studies and she became quite worried about her children. She began failing tests and getting behind in her work as a result. A crisis in her educational career was reached when she was criticized for the way she handled children in a practice teaching. Seeing her limited insurance and savings being spent and fearing ultimate failure, she suddenly decided to leave school and take a job as a secretary in a business firm. The job was not commensurate with her native abilities and not interesting to her but it was able to allay her anxiety and insecurity about herself. She thus condemned herself to lead a frustrating life and has indirectly limited the educational futures of her four children because of limited opportunities to improve her income.

The primary difficulty that Mrs. A encountered was psychological in nature, not academic. However, the two worked so closely together that she easily confused them and without proper guidance she will probably resign herself to a frustrating life unnecessarily.

Another type, the fickle learner, is typified by Mr. B. By dent of hard work and long hours, he became quite successful in a small business. At the age of 48 on a hunting trip, he had occasion to spend several days snowbound with a very well-educated and stimulating individual who astounded Mr. B with his wide range of interests and accomplishment. After this experience, he carefully examined his own life and realized that all he had known was business and his only pleasure or accomplishment was making money. He became gravely dissatisfied with his life despite his apparent financial success. Taking well-known personalities like Eisenhower and Churchill as examples, he gathered up his courage and enrolled in an art course. However, he did not make progress at a rate which satisfied him. He became increasingly critical of his work and began to question his artistic talent. Therefore, after a few weeks, he dropped art and began music lessons. He found it tedious to spend so many hours practicing and his progress seemed very slow. He quit music and turned to more academic things. Convinced that his skills were not in his hands, but rather in his head, he began a course in literature. However, he soon found that much of what he had to read was meaningless and it was difficult for him to concentrate on the material. He concluded that he was not really interested in literature and in very short time dropped the course. He subsequently spent time in golf and in jogging, bowling, and tennis, but none of these activities seemed to hold his interest and he became convinced that he was basically a failure in every way except his business; therefore he returned to his business and spent all of his time in his old pursuit of getting rich. Unfortunately, he overworked and in six months had a heart attack. After this he spent half time attending to his business and the other half worrying about his health. In a few months he retired because of increasing fear of having another heart attack and died soon afterwards, probably as much out of feelings of despair as for pathological reasons.

Another type of learner may be called the sporadic learner. Mrs. C typifies this sort of student. She was the wife of a successful lawyer and lived in a fashionable suburb, but life became more dull and monotonous as the children grew up and married. She teamed up with several other women of the neighborhood and wives of professional friends of her husband to seek intellectual stimulation. They decided to form a discussion club for themselves but the idea was also accepted enthusiastically by the husbands who were also becoming bored with life. The sessions proved stimulating and rewarding; however, in a couple of years it became increasingly difficult to develop programs for the group and eventually more and more people began skipping or cancelling meetings until the group simply fell apart. By this time Mrs. C was back to her old way of life again.

All of these people began by really trying to continue their education, they eventually discontinued their education. Probably every person reading these cases can find a number of explanations for this failure. One will feel the individuals did not concentrate well enough on the task he set out to do, his goals were vague or unrealistic, another will observe the people lacked self-discipline or persistence and didn't give the task enough time to really develop. These and any other explanations may seem satisfactory, but they only explain part of the problems. The real reason all of these individuals failed was because the individual or group did not know how to learn. Each of these individuals would have been well advised to receive some academic counseling before undertaking his educational experience, because not only did they fail at their educational task, their failure closed the door to future efforts at personal development.

Educational Counseling Problems of Adults

In order to assist adults in achieving their educational goals, it is very useful to know the most common problems that are likely to be encountered.

1. Lack of self-confidence in one's ability to learn.

Probably no other single problem is more universally encountered in counseling adults in educational matters than lack of confidence in their ability to learn. It is almost universally true that adults, to some degree, fear they are not able to learn as well as they were when they were young.

They seem to be able to recognize at the cognitive level that not everyone can learn everything, that people differ in intelligence, physical strength, dexterity, and special talent and they are able to understand that few men can be outstanding novelists, mathematicians, philosophers, etc. The concern of adults' problem is not over outstanding achievement, however, what they fear that they are below average. They fear that they cannot learn what even normal people are able to learn.

This fear or lack of self-confidence in learning seems to have two primary sources; first, a belief, emotionally very strong, that age somehow limits learning ability, and secondly, an underlying emotionally important concern that some important element has been left out or neglected in their personal development or makeup. For example, they wonder if they actually lack normal intelligence, or if they have any talent at all for learning foreign languages, etc.

In dealing with such unfounded fears, the adult needs to be reassurred by someone who knows the field of psychology well enough to answer specific questions about the learning abilities of adults. All experimental evidence indicates that a comparison of the relative learning ability of young people and adults does not indicate that adults have a serious handicap in learning. Rather it seems adults are able to learn most things better than youth are able to learn them, but it may take the adult a little longer to do it.

Youth appears to have some advantage in learning in areas requiring physical dexterity or bodily strength, this is not surprising. However, even physical strength can be greatly improved in older people in many cases with systematic and scientifically designed exercise, The young seem to be able to remember things better when it comes to mastering rote learning tasks, that is, things which are not particularly meaningful in themselves. Adults find it necessary to unlearn many things in this area because their habits are more deeply set. This would naturally be a handicap in learning this type of material. But rote learning is not the kind of learning which is required in most of our education. At any rate, even this is not insurmountable, it can be overcome with additional practice and the careful development of association patterns.

Usually adults have an advantage in learning because they have greater motivation. They have more settled purposes and needs, their attitude toward learning is more mature and these favorable dispositions make learning much more effective. With maturity, the adult has acquired greater experience and developed a broader range of associative patterns, he has a greater awareness of values, considerable practice in self-discipline, and a better knowledge of his personal abilities. These are all advantages. In one study a group of women over 42 who took courses at two different institutions received higher course grades than an 18 to 25 year old group of women in the same classes. The advantage for the older group remained despite differences in courses, methods of teaching, or instructors.

This underlying fear or anxiety or lack of self-confidence may not be apparent in the beginning of the educational program. However, it reveals itself quite readily when the student finds himself encountering difficulty in learning and beginning to fall behind in his work. Then he will seem to turn to his age as a rationalization and will frequently verbalize the belief that he can't learn

as well now as when he was young. It is practically certain that such a person will explain his problem by commenting that he has been away from studying for years and has nearly forgotten how to use his mind. This, of course, is usually true to a certain extent and it is usually advisable for an older student returning again to school to brush up on his learning skills if it is true, but this does not mean that he cannot learn as well as the student who has not been out of school at all. The counselor should encourage the student to work himself up to his former condition. He must convince the student that he is able to regain his former skill level with practice and the proper use of learning aids. The student is not bound by age so much as by poor study methods in most cases.

It might be observed in passing that these statements may be made by adults who, in fact, can't learn as well as youth; they are slow learners now and they weren't very good learners as children either! Their problem is they feel that being adults, they are expected to be able to do everything better than children can. This is simply not true. There are dumb kids and dumb adults, so long as one works to his capacity he should make no excuse for his ability.

Unless this anxiety about learning ability is taken care of properly, the adult is very likely to become seriously worried about his basic capacity to learn. If, in fact, he has limited intellectual abilities, his concern should not be <u>whether</u> he is able to learn but rather <u>what</u> he should learn. His problem is one of suiting his ambitions to his abilities, not questioning his abilities. If the educational problem seems to be the worry about ability itself, as is often the case, the best course of action is to get a reliable diagnosis of his ability.

Most adults tend to underestimate their ability. This is because they fear that they are unable to learn. It is very useful to ask them, "How do you know for certain you can't learn unless you have tried?" An individual does not have to aspire to become the world's leading authority to find pleasure and satisfaction in studying a particular subject. The less a person knows or is, the more he has to gain from

his effort. Counselors should expect a percentage of adults reentering education will have dark moments and discouraging periods of this sort, and be prepared to deal with them by providing positive reinforcement and realistic evaluation of both goals and ability.

2. Unrealistic expectations of progress

Because many adults have grown accustomed to succeeding in whatever they do, it is very upsetting for them to be faced with serious learning obstacles. During many years of their life they have tended to apply their efforts in areas where they were able to build on past successes. To strike out into new and different areas therefore can prove very threatening to an adult.

When a child attacks a problem, he expects to do much more work to achieve it than the average adult who somehow feels above all this. The adult acts as if he is an exception to the rule of hard work. His goals are set, they are very clear, he has considerable life experience, therefore he concludes he has an unusual advantage. However, there is no royal road to learning, all must take the same route.

It is very important that adults be counseled to set realistic learning goals. The following points should be kept in mind:

a. The person must be realistic about what he can achieve, especially about the amount of time required to achieve it.

b. He must be careful not to begin impulsively on an ambitious learning program about which he is very poorly informed. The better he understands the work required, the better off he will be.

c. He must be certain that he really wants the goal he has in mind. Is it very important to him or is it just something nice or desirable? Is the work required proportionate to the worth of the goal in his own mind?

d. After setting broad goals, he must divide it into specific subgoals which he can achieve on short periods of time, perhaps monthly or even daily. By dividing the project into parts which can be completed quickly, it will give satisfaction in stages. This maintains motivation and provides a measure of progress. The work for a once-a-week class should be divided into daily tasks which are small and can be accomplished in an hour or so rather than completed in a very long study period once a week. Completing such minor daily and weekly goals provides an obvious means of measuring progress and nothing succeeds like success.

e. It is wise to learn to enjoy the process as well as the goal of learning. Enjoying the process will make the work of achieving goals much more pleasant and make the learning an integral part of one's life.

3. Conflicting values and attitudes

One's points of view strongly influence his learning processes. As people grow, they form definite opinions and attitudes which can influence learning for good or ill. For example, in the study of economics, an adult who has worked as a labor leader will view the course quite differently from a student who is an industrialist or associated with the management function of business.

Having fixed attitudes and values can cause difficulties for older persons attending classes where a variety of points of view and attitudes toward subjects is not only tolerated but actively encouraged. They may feel the teacher knows no more than his students or he is failing to exercise proper authority by not deriding issues himself. In counseling adults having such problems, one should aim to try and develop an understanding that part of education requires developing an understanding of a variety of points of view. Some adults seem to feel it is their duty to settle class problems and they try to impose their view on all, or at least try to monopolize the discussion to keep it "orthodox." Older persons should

be cautioned about such traits or they will not be accepted by the rest of the class and this may sour them on education by making them feel unaccepted. This does not mean that the adult must keep his own insights and contributions under wraps entirely, but only that he should not expect his opinions to have any greater weight than anyone else's. Sharing opinions does not mean one should force his personal ideas on others. A useful approach such an adult can use in discussion is to concentrate on learning why each person holds the views he does and try to understand the position, not correct it. He should not force his own opinion on others beyond explaining why he believes what he does nor should he force others to prove their position after explaining it. If they change opinions, it is their own affair. Education is impossible for a person whose values and opinions have hardened to the point that he cannot tolerate new ideas or opposition to his own position.

4. Theoretical or irrelevant learning tasks

One of the adult's greatest assets in learning is the store of associations he can make by virtue of his past life experiences. His entire life can serve as a resource for background and perspective in learning. An important requirement for deep understanding is the ability to form numerous associations between new matter and previous learning. The more and more varied his past experiences have been, the easier this becomes.

Adults are frequently impatient with subjects which are taught in a general fashion or purely theoretically. They find this sort of learning irrelevant to life as they have experienced it. Such attitudes can make learning unnecessarily difficult for them because it becomes a constant source of irritation. Such students should compensate for these feelings by making special efforts to apply or relate what they are learning to their lives and life's problems. An added advantage of making such personal applications of subject matter to events which

have meaning in his own life is that the student works in the familiar ground where mistakes in application will be obvious to him and this will insure greater accuracy in learning. Such application encourages more interested study because it provides a sort of immediate reward through successful use. One should realize that the application of knowledge may take the form of further questioning, argumentation, and discussion as well as problem solfing.

Completely new subjects are difficult to integrate in this way for many students. Therefore it is useful to develop a background and acquire fundamental principles of a field beforehand. To secure this, it is advisable to read introductory or supplementary basic books in the same area. On occasion it may be wise to take a noncredit refresher or survey course if the student is in a degree program where grades are important.

The counselor should always foster the development of as wide a range of interests as possible in clients so that the learning base of each person will be kept as broad as possible. A systematic reading program covering a variety of reading materials is the most convenient and effective way to achieve this. (c.f. reading list at end.)

5. Seeking help too late or in the wrong places

Since students are not often unaware of their learning difficulties until they have been present for some time, counselors should be especially careful to be available to students in an informal way early in their learning career.

It is very likely most students will need some help when beginning a completely new area of study. In such cases, his best guide and counselor is his teacher. He should be encouraged to ask the teacher for supplementary materials which might be recommended by him as aids in learning the courses he teaches.

Students should be alert for signs that their learning is beginning to lag behind the others in the class. Often this is not made obvious until the first

quiz is returned. Unless the student is given some special help at this point, he may well be setting the stage for ultimate failure. A good rule of thumb to follow is this, if the student can not feel that he is making his progress, he is probably having difficulties. This is because his motivation is in jeopardy.

Another help in identifying students who may be having difficulty with their classes without knowing it is to gain an insight into whether the class provides for much discussion or application of what is being learned. Classes devoted entirely to lecture are not likely to remain popular for any length of time with adult students, generally. Such students are very inclined to participate in discussion, to raise questions, and seek concrete applications, and a lecture does not ordinarily permit this. Adults generally seem to learn better in groups which provide opportunities for sharing common or conflicting ideas and in which they can profit from the observations and mistakes of others. Another important quality of groups in which adults learn best is a spirit of friendly rivalry. Competition may be threatening, but friendly rivalry is stimulating, challenging, and supportive.

A final area which should be considered as a source of difficulty for students is the amount of family support which is being given him in his studies. Where the family is not sympathetic or cooperative with the student's educational needs, he can be working under a very serious handicap. Where the family is not backing his efforts, it takes unusual determination and very probably a very close confidante who is very supportive for a person to persevere for long. Obviously, counselors can serve as such a confidante very well.

6. Lack of efficient reading and study habits.

The vast majority of adults returning to school would be well advised to enroll in a short refresher course on learning to learn and reading improvement first. Where such a course is not available, at least a text on the subject

should be purchased and carefully reviewed. The major points around which necessary information should be organized would include :

a. Preparing to learn, that is, setting the stage psychologically and physically for the learning process. This includes a clarification of purposes, an understanding of the requirements of the course, and knowledge of the schedule of classes, etc.

b. Organizing to learn--this implies that an individual arranges his time schedule to allow for adequate study and travel time as well as class time. It may include suggestions about such things as gathering the necessary equipment and preparing a place for study at home or in a public library or other place where a student can spend his study time effectively.

c. Techniques of study--this will include textbook attack skills, methods of organization, outlining techniques, SQ3R approach, knowledge of how to use learning aids included in textbooks, etc.

d. Listening, notemaking, and test taking skills--

The student should be aware of the reading skills necessary to effectively study various subjects. He should know what to look for when he reads novels, essays, and poetry, for example; and he should understand that he is not expected to read everything in the same way. Many adults have not thought about reading for specific purposes for many years and would do well to review a manual which will provide them with guidance and direction in learning to read for details, reading for the general idea, reading to understand principles, reading to solve problems, and reading to follow directions. Many of these students would benefit greatly from a course in vocabulary improvement as well. Special attention should be given to exam skills because many adults are not familiar with objective tests.

These constitute the most common types of academic problems of interest to educational counselors. It should be noted, however, that almost any other problem the student is having whether it be related to his financial affairs, his physical health, his interpersonal relations, his concept of himself, his concern for society, etc. will always have some bearing on his ability to learn. The process of education itself, however, is very frequently a palative and ultimate remedy for many of these difficulties if the student can but persevere.

Given normal intelligence, average health, and even modest means, probably the most important ingredient in the process of continuing education is perseverance. The value of many of the aids, services, and facilities offered adult students can be measured in terms of how they contribute to this one element of persistence. It is persistence that brings a person through dark periods in his growth pattern. It is persistence which drives him to his ultimate success. It is persistence which enables counselors themselves ultimately to achieve their purposes in helping adults.

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Recommended Adult Reading List of Fifty
Significant Modern Books

THE FOREST & THE SEA
Bates, Marston
THE TRIAL OF DR. ADAMS
Bedford, Sybille
KARL MARX
Berlin, Isiah
MURDER FOR PROFIT
Bolitho, William
SHAKESPEARE
Brown, Ivor
AMERICAN PRESIDENCY
Brown, Stuart
MISTER JOHNSON
Carey, Joyce
MISTRESS TO AN AGE
Christopher, Harold J.
OX-BOW INCIDENT
Clark, Walter Van Tilburg
THE POWER & THE GLORY
Davenport, Walter
NAPOLEON'S RUSSIAN CAMPAIGN
DeSegur, Count Phillippe-Paul
THE AMERICAN CHARACTER
Drummond, Alexander
STORY OF PHILOSOPHY
Durant, Will
THE IMMENSE JOURNEY
Eiseley, Loren
THE GREAT CRASH
Galbraith, John
THE GREEK WAY
Hamilton, Edith
THE WORLDLY PHILOSOPHERS
Heilbroner, Robert L.
TRUE BELIEVER
Hoffer, Eric
NOTRE-DAME OF PARIS
Hugo, Victor
APES, ANGELS, & VICTORIANS
Irvine, William
ELIZABETH, THE GREAT
Jenkins, Elizabeth
PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST
Joyce, James
DARKNESS AT NOON
Kingsley, Sidney
REVEILLE IN WASHINGTON
Leech, Margaret
SCREWTAPE LETTERS
Lewis, Clive

A PREFACE TO MORALS
Lippman, Walter
KING SOLOMON'S RING
Lorenz, Konrad
EASTERN APPROACHES
Maclean, Fitzroy
ADMIRAL OF THE OCEAN SEA
Morison, Samuel
JOHN PAUL JONES
Morison, Samuel
LOGBOOK FOR GRACE
Murphy, Robert C.
ANIMAL FARM
Orwell, George
BURMESE DAYS
Orwell, George
ISRAELI
Parker, Louis
STALINGRAD
Plivier, Theodore
BRING OUT YOUR DEAD
Powell, J. H.
THE MAN OF THE RENAISSANCE
Roeder, Ralph
OUT OF AFRICA
Ross, Emory
THE CRIME OF GALILEO
Santillana, George de
ATTENDING MARVELS
Simpson, George
ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF IVAN DENISOVICH
Solzhenitxyn, Alexander Isaevich
DEVIL IN MASSACHUSETTS
Starkey, Marion
RICHER BY ASIA
Taylor, Edmond
THE DOCTOR & THE DEVILS
Thomas, Dylan
THE SEA & THE JUNGLE
Tomlinson, H. M.
THE GREAT REHEARSAL
Van Doren, Carl
MAN & THE LIVING WORLD
Von Frisch, Karl
SAINTS & STRANGERS
Willison, George
3 WHO MADE A REVOLUTION
Wolfe, Bertram
IN FLANDERS FIELDS
Wolff, Leon